

II INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE-SEMINAR

OF

TAMIL STUDIES

(January 3 to 10, 1968)

MADRAS, INDIA

PLENARY SESSIONS

LANDMARKS IN THE HISTORY OF TAMILNAD

K. K. Pillay

University of Madras, Madras, India

LANDMARKS IN THE HISTORY OF TAMILNAD

K. K. PILLAY
University of Madras, Madras, India

Who were the Tamils of old ? Where they the autochthons of South India ? Or, did they immigrate from outside ? These questions have been frequently asked ; but decisive answers to them are yet difficult to be given.

That the South Indian Peninsula constitutes one of the earliest regions inhabited by man is a fact accepted by geologists and ethnologists. There is the possibility of a vast stretch of land having extended to the south and east of it. The so-called Lemūrian continent might well have existed in the dim past. But it is doubtful whether at such an early age the fully developed man had begun to occupy that region. The theory advanced by Yuri Reshetov, the Russian geographer and anthropologist, in his recently published book, ' The Nature of the Earth and the Origin of Man ' is well worth consideration in this context. He does not speak of the Lemūrian continent as such, but thinks that the early people of the Indian subcontinent and Indo-China migrated through sea to regions like Australia and the Bahrein islands no less than 18,000–20,000 years ago. It is, however, too soon to build theories based on these postulates before they are indubitably proved.

There is no doubt that in much later times, say, in the Neolithic age, South India could have become the home of the ancestors of the Tamils. But had they come from outside ? The urn-burials and the pottery discovered at the pre-historic burial site in Ādichanallūr on the banks of the Tāmraparṇi deserve more systematic examination at the hands of archæologists than it has received so far. Among the funeral furnishings on this site are found gold diadems and mouth-pieces along with household articles and utensils. The gold mouth-pieces are embossed with ornamental geometrical designs. Similar mouth-pieces have been found in tombs of Cyprus of the late Bronze

age. In Gerar at Palestine, gold frontlets similar to the Ādichanallūr diadems have been discovered, which are assignable to about 1200 B.C. More striking is the fact that among the tombs in Palestine a trident of iron has been found, similar to those at Ādichanallūr. Apparently, the worship of Murugan seems to have been in vogue in some regions of Western Asia. These remarkable discoveries suggest that either the Tamils might have emigrated from Western Asia into South India, or that batches of early Tamils might have gone thither, probably for purposes of trade and settled down there. Since Muruga worship has continued through the ages in South India and not in Palestine, the latter hypothesis seems more acceptable.

But the Sumērian affinities with the so-called Indus Valley culture seem to lend support to the view that a large-scale migration from Western Asia into India might have taken place in the 3rd millennium B.C. However, the suggestion of various possibilities does not amount to a categorical assertion one way or the other. More decisive evidence has to be awaited before final conclusions can be formulated.

There is the persistent view upheld by certain archæologists and linguists that the original home of the entire Dravidian peoples was Western Asia, that they first came and occupied the Indus Valley and that they subsequently spread to several parts of India, including the extreme south. This hypothesis receives some support from the presence of certain Dravidian words in the Ṛig Vēda. In this connection it must be noticed that a certain measure of resemblance between the relics of the Indus Valley civilisation and those of the Early Tamils are traceable, although the conclusions of Fr. Heras regarding the similarity of the two scripts still await confirmation. On the other hand attempts have been made to ascribe the Hārappan culture to an earlier wave of Āryan immigration. But there are fundamental differences between the two. In fact, speculations on the basis of inconclusive data cannot be scientific. We have to await the decipherment of the script of the Indus Valley inscriptions before a convincing answer to this difficult question can be provided.

A safe starting point is the invaluable treasure of Tamil literature belonging to the Śaṇgam age. It is now firmly established that the

bulk of the surviving classics of the Śaṅgam belongs to the early centuries of the Christian Era. But a controversy regarding the number of the Academies remains unsettled. It is easy to dismiss the account provided by the commentary to the Iṛayinār Ahapporul as a figment of the author's imagination. But, on the other side, the persistent tradition about the earlier Śaṅgam works which are now lost, as well as the legends about the two deluges of the sea recorded in the Ceylonese chronicles suggest that the existence of two earlier Śaṅgams is not a myth. For the attainment of high literary standard in the 1st century A. D., there should have been a development of the literature for some time prior to it. True, the fantastic periods of duration of the Śaṅgams and the incredible legends associated with the Academies are mythical; but the fact of three academies having existed in the past does not deserve to be summarily dismissed as baseless.

Nor can it be held on the basis of early Brāhmi inscriptions that the Tamil language was not well developed in the 2nd century B.C., as has been asserted by an historian. The epigraphs themselves are far too short to permit of any deduction regarding the linguistic attainment of the Tamils of that epoch. Some Tamil and Prakrit words are found jumbled together in these inscriptions which record the donation of caves to Buddhists and Jains from outside. Equally invalid is the contention of the same writer that the pre-Āryan Tamils possessed only a rather ' primitive and poorish culture '. The literary standard attained by the Tamils of the 1st century A.D. if not of an earlier period, runs counter to that view.

It has to be observed that the advent of the Āryans into the extreme South did not take place much earlier than the 5th century B.C. The oldest Śaṅgam poems show little trace of Sanskrit influence. It is only with the lapse of time that Sanskrit words and ideas penetrated into the warp of Tamil literature. By the time that some of Kiḷ-kaṇakku works appeared, the result of the inflow of Āryan language had increased.

A vivid picture of the civilisation of the Tamils during the early centuries of the Christian Era is gleaned from the Śaṅgam classics.

The particular word 'Śaṅgam' was of later origin; it must have flourished under an earlier designation like 'Avai' or 'Kūḍal'. Politically, there were the three kingdoms of the Chēra, Chōḷa and Pāṇḍya, seven Vaḷḷals and other minor chieftains. The monarchies in particular must have attained a considerable stage of political development much earlier than the 1st century A.D. The Hāthigumpha inscription of Khāravēla, belonging to the 1st half of the 2nd century B.C., speaks of a league of Tamil States, which was 113 years old at the time of the inscription and had been a menace to the Kaliṅga kingdom for some time past. Obviously the Tamil kingdoms had attained a certain measure of strength and efficiency even before the 3rd century B.C.

The kings and chieftains often engaged themselves in mutual warfare, but in respect of their duties they were actuated by certain well-recognised ideals and moral principles suited to the age. The concern for the welfare of the subjects weighed greatly with the monarchs. The advent of the Āryans exerted a considerable influence on the kings and their conduct, because the newcomers soon occupied an important position at the royal courts. On the whole, the Śaṅgam age was conspicuous for social stability and literary progress. It was characterised by unconventional simplicity.

About the 4th century A.D. there was a cataclysm in the Tamil country, and the glory of the Śaṅgam age suffered a severe set-back. The Kaḷabhras, as these intruders have been called, spread disaster and ruin, and the Tamil kings seem to have failed in their resistance to them. The Vēḷvikkuḍi inscription of the 9th century reveals how the wicked invaders had caused disorder in the country. Who these Kaḷabhras were, it is not known. It is generally believed that they were a fierce tribe belonging to some place in the north of Tirupati. They appear to have been converted to Buddhism prior to their advent into Tamilnad. A state of chaos prevailed until the end of 6th century A.D., when the Pāṇḍyan King, Kaḍuṁkōn put an end to the Kaḷabhra rule and revived the Pāṇḍyan power.

Almost about the same time the Pallavas emerged as a strong power under the illustrious Mahēndravarman I (580–630 A.D.). The

origin of the Pallavas is another unsettled problem. But every thing considered, they seem to have been of a non-Tamil stock. In all probability they were successors of the Sātavāhanas and they hailed from the Āndhra country. They contributed considerably to the development of Sanskrit literature. Besides, they beautified their capital Kāñchi as well as Mahābalipuram with admirable works of art.

The Chōḷa revival under the Vijayālaya line constitutes the next important epoch, politically and culturally. An empire of considerable extent and strength was established by Rāja Rājā I and his equally famous son, Rājèndra I. Not only did they succeed in acquiring a substantial empire in South India but undertook successful expeditions in North India and in South-East Asia. The surnames, 'Gaṅgaikoṇḍa' and 'Kaḍāramkoṇḍa' are indicative of these facts. But the abiding contribution of the Chōḷas is the establishment of a harmonious culture built on the foundations of Tamil and Sanskrit bases. The temple became, more than ever before, the pivot of the religious, social and cultural progress.

Though the Chōḷa power received a fresh increase of strength under Kulōttuṅga I (1070-1118 A.D.) and his successors, it became enfeebled in the 13th century, and as a consequence of domestic disruption, it declined.

In the void created by the decline of the Chōḷas, the Pāṇḍyas stepped in. In the 13th century Jaṭāvarman Sundara and Māravarman Kulaśēkhara elevated the Pāṇḍyan power to primacy in the South. They, too, were ardent patrons of culture and religion. Generous benefactions to temples appeared during their reigns. Though the later Pāṇḍyas continued to exercise benign rule down to the 18th century, their political sphere of power was restricted to the extreme south, round about Tenkāśi. Some of the later Pāṇḍyas rendered signal service to the cause of Tamil literature and the fine arts. At Mudurai, the traditional capital of the Pāṇḍyas, the reign of Kulaśēkhara Pāṇḍya witnessed the the rise of a war of succession between his two sons. It was about this time that Mālik Kāfūr, Alāuddin's general, undertook a plundering expedition (1311), sacked

several places and carried rich booty with him. The Pāṇḍyas at Madurai failed to recover their authority, and consequently confusion prevailed. There followed a more organised invasion of the Tughlaks, and it led to the establishment of a Sultanate of Madurai under the supreme authority of the Delhi Sultanate. Though after a time the local governor assumed independence of Delhi, he maintained power but for a while only, because Kumāra Kampana, the Vijayanagar general, attacked and defeated the Muslims there and established the supremacy of Vijayanagar. But the authority of Vijayanagar over the Tamil country was nominal. The Pāṇḍyan power was restored at Madurai; however, the kings were not able to maintain effective authority over the entire Tamil country. Local risings disturbed the peace of the land, and in the reign of Achyuta Rāya (1529–42) there arose a formidable rebellion in the Tamil country, aided by the Tiruvaḍi of Kēraḷa. The rising was, however, suppressed, and the Pāṇḍya was restored to power. Another rebellion in the time of Sadāśiva Rāya (1542–76) arose; but history repeated itself. The Tiruvaḍi and the other rebels were vanquished, and the Pāṇḍya was restored. Vijayanagar generals extended a liberal patronage to temples in the South during the course of their expeditions. After the epoch-making battle of Taḷikōṭa the governors of Jiñji, Tañjavūr and Madurai became independent Nāyaks in their respective regions.

The Nāyaks carried on the local governments satisfactorily for a time, though wars with the neighbouring chieftains were not infrequent. It must be said to their credit that invariably they became enthusiastic patrons of art, architecture and other fine arts. Construction of new temples as well as the embellishment of older ones were undertaken under the discerning patronage of the Nāyaks. Tirumalai Nāyak was an outstanding patron of fine arts. The famous Tirumala Nāyakkan palace and the Lily tank are some of his contributions in addition to his beautification of certain celebrated temples.

The importation of an element of Telugu population into Tamilnad occurred during the period of the Nāyaks. Not only were certain colonies founded in places like Śrivillipputtūr, but in almost all important villages and towns, groups of Telugu colonists were imported and settled. In course of time they became naturalised Tamilians

though they continue to use their mother tongue in a corrupted form for purposes of domestic communication.

The Muslim contact which began in the time of Alāuddin Khilji and Muhammad bin Tughlak led to the establishment of certain local governorships which lasted but for a short while. Tipu's invasions in the 18th century contributed to the conversion of a considerable section of the populace. But the Muslims of the Tamil country have always cherished Tamil as their mother tongue, and during recent times, some notable poets and writers in Tamil have adorned their ranks.

A word about the Maratha kings of Tañjāvūr is needed. Sivāji's expedition in 1677 to the Carnatic led ultimately to the creation of a Maratha principality in Tañjavūr, which continued to exist with various fortunes till it was annexed by Dalhousie in 1855. Some of the Maratha kings like Tuḷaja patronised literature and fine arts. In particular, Rāja Sarfōji, who had studied under the Danish Missionary, Schwartz, became an enlightened ruler and collected rare and valuable books, manuscripts and paintings and preserved them in the famous Saraswathi Mahal Library.

Meanwhile, the 17th century saw the advent of the English, Dutch and French. But after a time the Dutch transferred their centre of activities to South-East Asia. The English concentrated on their commerce; but the intervention of the French in local politics led the British to follow them in the game. Their rivalry ended in 1763 with the fall of Pondicherry into the British hands. The French settlers in Pondicherry and Karaikkal have in a way contributed to the permeation of the French language, literature and culture among certain sections of the Tamils in these places.

Slowly but steadily, the British worked up their way. The Nawab of Carnatic was unable to maintain his power against the British. He became heavily involved in debt, and moreover, his complicity with Tipu provided the pretext for the British assumption of the Carnatic. With the defeat of Tipu, Dindigul, Salem and Coimbatore were annexed. The Tamils of the South put up a stout resistance at places, but it was hardly well organised. The names of

Kaṭṭabomman and the Marudu Brothers are foremost among those who opposed the new power. Though it is too much to claim that they were imbued by lofty ideals of nationalism and patriotism, they were doughty champions of their personal and communal rights, and they desrve to be remembered for their bold resistance, despite its short lived character. The able Governor-General, Lord Wellesley, was able to complete the annexation of Tamilnad, and the Madras Presidency was created in 1802.

During the course of the 19th century the new system of administration was introduced by the British. The English language assumed importance, and Tamilnad was quick to take advantage of the new set-up. In the 20th century patriots like Bharati and V.O.C. appeared and kindled the national awakening. Though on the one side the Tamils evinced their practical acumen by working the Dyarchy introduced in 1919, the nationalist leaders kept aloft the banner of revolt. With the grant of independence of 15th August 1947, Tamilnad like the rest of India, became free. The States Reorganisation Commission settled the boundaries of Tamilnad, and in spite of certain disabilities, commendable progress has been made by the Tamils during the past few decades.

SOCIAL LIFE

It need hardly be repeated that History is no longer the chronicle of kings and queens, wars and treaties. The life of the people through the ages is the most important aspect of history. Their social and economic conditions, religion and philosophy, art and architecture constitute the really vital aspects of history.

Though the Tamils have lived in Tamiḷaham for long, at least from the Neolithic age, they seem to have evolved a settled and progressive life from some time prior to the Śaṇgam epoch. The people living in the five natural regions of Kuṛiñchi, Pālai, Neydal, Mullai and Marudam pursued occupations suited to the respective tracts. The occupational distribution was not too rigid and a change over from one region to another was not too difficult.

A happy and contented life was the order of the day. Agriculture was the main occupation, though trade and industry also developed

soon. Internal treade was brisk, but more striking was the development of sea-borne commerce, probably earlier than the 7th century B.C. Trade with foreign countries led to the interchange of certain social habits and customs and occasionally to the settlement of certain outsiders in Tamiḻaham.

The increased development of trade and the inflow of wealth promoted the rise of cites and ports. Urban life must have become fashionable in certain places, but the bulk of the people lived the simple unsophisticated life of villagers.

CASTE

The faint beginnings of the hoary caste system are discernible in the Śaṅgam classics ; but it cannot be said that the fourfold classification had emerged on an organised scale during that epoch. No doubt, brahmins appear on the scene. But the Kshatriyas and Vaiśyas are not discernible as distinct castes ; the duties traditionally associated with them were discharged by various classes of people. Moreover, the functional distribution had by no means become rigid. Apparently there occurred a blending of the occupational basis with the northern Varṇāshrama system. In this connection it is noteworthy that a poem in the Puṛanāṉṉṛu says that there is no caste or tribe except the Tuḍiyar, Pāṉar, Paṛaiyar and Kadambar. This is attempted to be explained as a reference only to the martial communities of the land. But it does not seem too much to consider them as the only four indigenous communities, then uninfluenced by the later caste system. By the age of the Epics, the caste distinction, with its concomitant features of untouchability and unapproachability, had appeared, as may be seen from the reference in the Śilappadikāram to the goldsmith walking at a distance from the thorough fare used by people of the higher castes.

As time passed, more brahmins flowed into Tamilnad ; they received patronage at the hands of kings and nobles. With their advent the religious rituals became more important and elaborate. The growing rivalry of Jainism and Buddhism with Hinduism was partly responsible for the stiffening of the caste differences. The

Bhakti movement of the 7th and 8th centuries witnessed a placid acceptance of the caste regulations.

Learning was yoked with religion. The result was that learning became a monopoly of the higher classes, particularly of the highest. It was possible to acquire a knowledge of the three Rs by mary sections, but there were multitudes who did not avail themselves of it. Education was governed by occupation no less than by caste. The lower castes were consigned to menial work, and there was no scope of intellectual or cultural development on their part. It is noteworthy that a democratic approach to education was not developed until very recent times.

Women had considerable freedom as well as scope for learning in the Śaṅgam period. There were some poetesses, too. But there occurred a gradual deterioration in the position of women, particularly from the medieval times. Early marriage was unknown in the Śaṅgam age. Marriage had, however, become sanctimonious with the tying of the Tāli. The ceremony became more elaborate by the age of the Śilappadikāram. Sati was not common, though some instances are known. Monogamy was the general rule, but persons in affluent positions often took to polygamy. Through the ages feminine modesty was a feature of Tamil society. From the time of Rāja Rāja the Great the institution of Dēvadāsis was introduced on an organised scale. Attached to temples, they were dedicated to service there. Right through the medieval period they were found to be sincere in their devotion to temples, and several of them had bestowed lands and gifts on various shrines. It is only from about the 16th century that there occurred a gradual degeneracy in their moral standards of conduct.

By and large the social life of the Tamils has not undergone radical changes from times of old. The family tie has always been strong. Through the ages the authority of the head of the family has been respected. The joint family system had come into vogue, but it was not unusual for youngsters setting up their independent household after marriage. In recent times the joint family system has shown signs of a break-up, consequent on the migration of educated

members of society to towns and cities in quest of urban employment, particularly in the learned professions.

RELIGION

Perhaps the earliest form of religion started with the worship of deceased heroes. Hero-stones of the pre-historic epoch testify to this. In the Śaṅgam age the worship of several deities including Śiva and Muruha was common. Several Āryan deities like Indra and Varuṇa had entered the pantheon. Efforts of some researchers to prove that Śiva and Muruha were also Āryan deities at the outset seem to be as unconvincing as those of others who contend that Varuṇa and Indra were originally Tamiḷian gods.

In the Śaṅgam age itself, sacrifices, rituals and ceremonies of the Āryan pattern had appeared, though in the remote villages, the worship of the pre-Āryan deities in the traditional manner has continued, often side by side with the imported practices.

The Brāhmī inscriptions in the extreme South indicate the advent of Jainism and Buddhism, perhaps by the 3rd century B.C., if not earlier. But it is doubtful whether they had spread extensively in the Tamil land before the 3rd or 4th century A.D. With the onrush of the Kaḷabhras, Buddhism enjoyed royal patronage. Both Jainism and Buddhism seem to have spread over a considerable part of Tamiḷaham, including the Chēra country, by the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. Indeed it was their increased popularity that provoked the growth of the Bhakti movement.

The beginnings of the Bhakti cult are traceable to the 3rd or 4th century A.D., though it blossomed into full vigour from the 7th century A.D. The peregrinations to sacred temples and the array of inspired songs of the devoted Śaiva Nāyanmārs and Vaishṇava Āḷvars belong to this epoch. Tirujñāna Sambandar, Tirunāvukkaraśar, and Sundaramūrti, the celebrated Dēvaram Trio, were the principal leaders of the Śaivite Bhakti movement. The date of the illustrious Māṇikkavāchagar is acutely disputed. But weighing all the available pieces of evidence it appears that he has to be assigned to the 9th century A.D. Both the Dēvaram and the Tiruvāchagam are remarkably

simple in language, but are full of devotional fervour. The influence that they have exercised over the Śaivites through the ages cannot be exaggerated.

About the same time the philosophic aspect of Śaivism was developed by the great Śankarāchārya. Primarily arising as a counter-blast to Buddhism, his philosophy lays emphasis on monism. He reorganised the ascetic order of Hinduism on the Buddhist model, and he contributed to the revival and stabilisation of Śaivism throughout India.

Correspondingly Vaishṇavism also made a popular appeal through the Āḷvārs and Āchāryas. They, too, laid emphasis on simple, but whole-hearted devotion and flooded the land with songs of deep fervour. The Vaishṇava Bhakti movement began earlier than its Śaivite counterpart. Poygai Āḷvār, Bhūdattāḷvār and Pēyālvār were the earliest among the Vaishṇava leaders of the Bhakti school, and although their exact dates are difficult to be determined, the available evidence indicates that they appeared about the 4th or 5th century A.D. Tirumaliśai of the 7th century A.D., Tirumaṅgai of the 8th, Periyāḷvār and Āṇḍāḷ, Kulaśēkhara and Nammāḷvār, more or less of the 9th century were among famous leaders of the Bhakti movement on the Vaishṇavite side. The Vaishṇava philosophy was greatly developed by Rāmṇnuja of the 11th century, the counterpart of Śankara of the 9th century and Madhva of the 13th century. Rāmānuja propounded the philosophy of Viśishṭādvaita which reconciled devotion to a personal God with the philosophy of the Vēdānta. It is not always realized how Rāmānuja, in his liberality of outlook, was far ahead of his times. He laid stress on the universality of Bhakti irrespective of caste. In a sense Rāmānuja may be considered as a precursor of Gandhiji who fought for temple entry for the untouchables, because Rāmānuja arranged that the untouchables should be admitted for worship in some important temples on one day in the year.

The Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy had its roots in the Tirumandiram of Māmūlar which appeared earlier than the 9th century A.D., but witnessed its stupendous development under Meykaṇḍār, a Veḷḷāla devotee of the 13th century. His Śivajnāna Bōdham,

containing the essence of his philosophy, expounded the relations of God, matter and soul. The Maṭhas, like the temples were responsible for the development of philosophy as well as popular devotion. It has been rightly held that the Temple and the Maṭha are the greatest gifts of medieval Tamiḷaham to Hinduism.

Jainism, more than Buddhism, had a considerable hold in the southern regions of Tamilaham, and has had a pronounced share in the development of Tamil literature. Even now several Jains continue to flourish in South Arcot, although they are externally indistinguishable from the neighbouring Hindus.

There is a good sprinkling of Muslims, particularly in the North Arcot, Tanjavur, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari Districts. A few are descendants of early Arab settlers, but most of them were converts at various stages. Quite a large number of the Muslims of Tamilnad were converts of the time of Tipu. The Labbais and Marakkayars, as they are called, are remarkably Tamilian in their affiliations. There is usually a healthy spirit of concord with the neighbouring Hindus. Some of them visit the adjoining Hindu shrines and occasionally offer coconuts to the local Gaṇapati temples praying that their wishes be fulfilled. Hindus, too offer prayers to tombs of Fakirs in places like Nagore, Tirupparangunram and Vaniyambadi. Several Hindus believe that pious Muslims, emerging from prayer at the Mosque, have the rare gift of healing ailing patients, whatever their religion. It is unquestionable that Tamilnad has always witnessed generally a much more cordial relationship between Hindus and Muslims than anywhere else in India.

Christians, too, have constituted a respectable number in Tamilnad from an early time. There is the oft-repeated tradition of the visit of St. Thomas to San Thomé in Madras in the 1st century A.D., and his conversion of many people to Christianity. It is notable that Marco Polo of the 13th century speaks of the martyrdom of St. Thomas on the Mount, now known after him. A systematic conversion to Christianity appeared from the time of St. Francis Xavier. The Portuguese, Dutch, as well as the French and English have played a part in founding and encouraging Missions in several parts of South India, particularly

in Tiruchirappalli and farther south. Great devotees and religious leaders like Robert di Nobili and Father Beschi are outstanding Churchmen who have made history in Tamilnad by their unstinted work no less than by their nobility of character. The Christian Missionaries have rendered enormous service in the cause of education during the past few centuries, and several institutions have continued to provide education to an increasing number of people. Nor can it be ignored that that the lives of many downtrodden souls in Tamiḷaham have been improved vastly, though as in all such cases certain drawbacks could always be indicated.

LITERATURE

The glory of the early Tamils rests on the legitimately famous Śaṅgam literature. It does not seem to be wild fantasy or wishful thinking that several of the old Śaṅgam works must have been lost beyond recovery. The antiquity associated with such works as well as the very totally inadequate means of preserving them can easily account for their loss, and at least in part, if not in whole, the description of the commentator of the Irayinār Ahapporuḷ in this matter seems to be based on truth.

However, the student of history can have no compunction in assigning the extant Śaṅgam works to the early centuries of the Christian Era. The distinctive feature of the Śaṅgam literature is its conspicuously realistic character, attuned to, and vividly portraying the simple, but elegant life of the early Tamils. The earliest stratum is essentially the product of Tamil genius, though in course of time Sanskrit influence also contributed its share. It is remarkable that a good number of Northeners be took themselves enthusiastically to the promotion of Tamil literature and several of them have made notable contributions to it. The view that Kapilar, a celebrated brahmin poet of the Śaṅgam age, composed the Kuṛiñchippāṭṭu with the express purpose of impressing the beauty of Tamil to the Āryan King Brihadattan is revealing and is of no small significance.

The enumeration and classification of the Śaṅgam works have also encountered difficulties. The traditional views that among the

extant works the Tolkāppiyam belongs to the Second Śaṅgam and that the Pattuppāṭṭu and Eṭṭuttogai, as well as the Padiṅenkiḷkaṇakku and the twin Epics belong to the third Śaṅgam is not accepted on all hands. Apart from those who had a set purpose in deliberately ante-dating or post-dating the early classics, there are others who have certain valid reasons to conclude that some of the Padineṇkiḷkaṇakku works and the Epics belong to a slightly later epoch than the classics assigned to the third Śaṅgam.

Among the twin Epics it is widely acknowledged that the Śilap-padikāram is unquestionably the more brilliant production. In respect of the theme, vividity of portraiture and elegance of diction it stands unique in Tamil literature. It is believed that the accredited author of this illustrious work was Iḷaṅgō, the younger brother of Chēran Śeṅguṭṭuvan, and that he was a Jain by faith. This, as well as the date of the work still remain disputed questions.

However, during the period between the Epics and the hymns of the Bhakti movement the literary products in Tamil do not seem impressive. Perhaps the Kaḷabhra interregnum was partly responsible for this. The hymns of the Āḷvārs and Nayanmārs are noted for their simplicity, directness and emotional fervour. Following them came the well-known Nālāyira Prabandam, Periyapurāṇam and other religious works of the medieval period.

The age of the Imperial Chōḷas witnessed a renaissance in the growth of Tamil literature. Besides the Kallāḍam, the Muttoḷḷāyiram and Nannūl, there appeared the Jīvakachintāmaṇi of Tiruttakkadēvar, and Sūḷāmani and above all the Rāmāyana of Kamban, a genius of a high order. The Kaliṅgattupparaṇi, Mūvar Ulā, Takkāyagapparaṇi and grammatical works like Yāpparuṅgalam, Yāpparuṅgalakkārigai and Vīraśoḷiyam all appeared side by side with the ever-increasing array of religious and philosophical works.

In later times, particularly beginning from the 18th century Sthalapurāṇas appeared in large numbers. Fr. Beschi prepared a Tamil-Latin Dictionary and a Portuguese-Latin-Tamil Dictionary besides his famous Chaduragarādi or Quadruple Dictionary. Prose was developed particularly from the 19th century, if we exclude some

of the high class prose versions embodied in the numberless inscriptions of Tamilnad, almost incomparable in volume and value. In the development of prose, the novel, essay and short story have become popular. The nationalist movement has played its part in the promotion of Tamil journalism.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

In no other field of progress have we to admit our ignorance of the activities of the early ages as in the field of fine art including architecture, sculpture, painting and iconography. All the products of the pre-Pallava epoch are inevitably lost, because they were made of perishable material like wood. The elaborate descriptions of palaces, temples and bazaars found in the Śaṅgam classics could not have been mere figments of imagination. It is not unlikely that structures of earth and constructions of timber must have existed in the early centuries of the Christian Era.

The Pallava period was a decisive landmark in art and architecture, because the use of stone in these branches appeared with them. The Maṇḍagappaṭṭu inscription of Mahēndravarman I states that he constructed for the first time a temple of stone without using timber, brick or mortar. This pattern set the style for later edifices, for though the above-mentioned temple of Mahēndravarman was a rock-cut structure, it gave a lead to the construction of stone temples, of which we have several examples in the Pallava period itself.

Narasimhavarman Mahāmalla, the successor of Mahendravarman I, constructed several maṇḍapas of stone, monolithic rathas and sculptures, besides the unique facade of open-air sculpture on a massive rock, supposed to depict Arjuna's penance. These were followed in the 8th century by structural temples which are found at Mahābalipuram, Panamalai and Kāñchipuram.

The Pāṇḍyas of the Kaḍuṅkon line seem to have imitated the rock-cut structures of the Pallavas as may be seen from that at Kauḷgumalai. Besides, stone sculptures and icons were produced in the same period, the best examples of which are found in the cave temples at Tirumalaipuram and Kaḷugumalai. The images of Brahmā, Narasimha

and Subrahmaṇia at Kaḷugumalai are fascinating, while the sculptures of Brahmā, Vishṇu and Gaṇēśa in the Tirumalaipuram temple resemble their Pallava counterparts.

But it was under the Imperial Chōḷas that architecture, sculpture and other fine arts reached their sublime height. The Rājarājēswara temple at Tañjāvūr and that of Gaṅgaikoṇḍa Cholesvara at Gaṅgaikoṇḍa Chōḷapuram are some of the magnificent structures of South India. They were followed by others like those of the Airāvatēśvara at Dārāsuram and the Kampaharēśvara at Tribhuvanam in the later Chōḷa period which also witnessed additional structures in the older temples of Chidambaram and Śrīrangam.

The recently discovered paintings in the Rājarājēśvara temple show that this branch of art, too, was not neglected. But, by far the most distinctive contribution of the Chōḷas to fine art was the superb carving of bronze images. The Naṭarāja bronzes are of unrivalled excellence, as has been demonstrated by the late Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy. Numerous other images, including those of Vishṇu and Lakshmi and of the Śaiva Nāyanmārs are of high quality. It is deeply regrettable that the bronze images of later times in Tamilnad are of a conventional and stiff pattern.

Under the later Pāṇḍyas, Vijayanagar emperors and Nāyak rulers improvements in the construction of temples and of their component parts were undertaken. Maṇḍapas and Gōpuras as well as corridors figured prominently during these later periods. Stone carving of great dexterity was developed as may be seen in the temples at Śrirangam and Tadpatri. The Marātha kings of Tañjāvūr were discerning patrons of fine arts, particularly of painting, music and dancing.

Music and dance were developed by the early Tamils from early times. Not to speak of these arts enthusiastically cultivated by the Pāṇar and Viraḷiyar of old, the most remarkable specimens of skilled music and dance are found replete in the Śilappadikāram. It has been contended by some that these intricate patterns of music and dance were of North Indian origin. But the grounds on which this view is advanced are not convincing. There might have been influences

in respect of details ; but the basic structure in both the fields of music and dance seem to be of indigenuous growth.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that in the political, social, economic, commercial, religious, literary and artistic branches of activity, there have been remarkable developments in Tamilnad through the ages. There have appeared extraneous influences in certain directions, and they have contributed to a healthy development of intellectual and cultural progress. At the same time there have been dark spots and certain unwholesome developments which have also to be borne in mind in an impartial survey of history.

Hoe & Co., Madras-1.